Nova Scotia
Speech From The Throne

Her Honour
The Honourable Mayann E. Francis, o.n.s.
Lieutenant Governor

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Thursday, September 17, 2009

For the First Session of the Sixty-First General Assembly
Nova Scotia House of Assembly

A Better Deal for Today's Families

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, ladies and gentlemen, the people of Nova Scotia:

Welcome to the first session of the 61st General Assembly.

On June 9th of this year, Nova Scotians made a decisive and historic choice.

They elected the first New Democratic Party government in Atlantic Canada.

My government is honoured by the trust Nova Scotians have placed in them.

It is fitting, then, that we begin by recognizing the achievements of some of the people of this great province.

From the Stanley Cup to our talented young athletes ... Nova Scotians have been getting noticed.

This summer, Nova Scotia's athletes had their best performance ever in the 2009 Canada Games. This will serve as a successful backdrop when the Canada Winter Games come to Halifax in 2011.

Sidney Crosby brought home the Stanley Cup. This remarkable young man made Nova Scotians proud — not only for his athletic ability but for his grace and humanity.

In the past several months, we lost a number of respected Nova Scotians who truly defined humanity.

In the century that Muriel Duckworth walked on this earth, she worked as a tireless crusader and advocate for peace and social justice, giving a voice to those who were silenced by others.

Donald Marshall, Jr. also spoke for those who could not. He was a reluctant hero who changed the face of our justice system and left a legacy of native rights for Atlantic Canadians.

Two noted legislators were also lost. Our sympathies are with the families of former MLAs Bill Gillis and Guy Brown. Their commitment to public service is a testament to their characters and is gratefully acknowledged.

They believed in making life better for ordinary Nova Scotians, which is fundamental to our government's belief — and is at the heart of our mandate.

My government's first priority is simple. It is to keep the promises we made to Nova Scotians.

Next week, we will outline our spending estimates and the specific measures of how we intend to keep our commitments.

Nova Scotians ca be assured we will live within our means.

We began by reducing the size of Cabinet from 18 to 12 members.

One of my government's first orders of business was to hire an independent firm to review the state of the province's finances.

In early August we received the interim report.

The results were not what we were hoping for.

If we do not make changes, Nova Scotia's deficit will balloon to $1.3 billion by 2012.

That is not the legacy this government wants to leave future Nova Scotians.

Soon, a knowledgeable panel of economic and policy analysts will report to government on what it believes will hasten Nova Scotia's fiscal and economic recovery.

We will listen. We will make careful, disciplined choices as we face the challenges ahead.

One of the first challenges we — and other governments around the world — face is the threat of a global H1N1 pandemic.

All Nova Scotians have a role to play in protecting themselves and their families.

Nova Scotians must take the necessary precautions and advice from health care professionals.

In light of the Auditor General's report, my government will take every necessary step to be ready to address this public health priority.

Making Life Affordable

One of my government's key commitments was to remove the provincial portion of the HST off basic home electricity. That promise too has been kept.

We did this because we want to make life more affordable for Nova Scotians and their families.

We are also making it easier for low-income homeowners to receive energy upgrades.

Soon, my government will bring forward legislation to establish an independent administrator to increase energy efficiency — helping Nova Scotians save money on their energy bills.

The strength of any society can be judged on how its most vulnerable are treated.

My government believes its citizens must be treated with respect, recognized for their intrinsic value and the richness they provide to caring, compassionate communities.

We know that some Nova Scotians are struggling, even more so in these challenging economic times.

We will reach out to these Nova Scotians.

We will take the first steps in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. This year, we will increase the income threshold for the Nova Scotia Child Benefit. This will extend full benefits to thousands of children and their families.

My government will begin to redesign the Employment Support and Income Assistance Program to make it more responsive to the individuals it is designed to serve.

We will seek the input of the community as we undergo the redesign of this program.

My government believes we can — and must — make significant progress in the fight against poverty.

We will also take steps to ensure that seniors are able to stay in their homes longer.

Next year, we will implement self-managed care allowances and personal alert assistance programs.

My government will adopt policies to ensure that seniors and other residents no longer have to provide a security deposit when they enter long-term care facilities.

My government will introduce legislation that will recognize the right of couples to be placed together in the same nursing home.

Jobs and Learning

As is the case around the globe, Nova Scotia continues to face economic challenges.

Every available tool must be used to foster economic growth.

We have put in place a new home construction rebate to help stimulate the economy.

Up to 1,500 new home buyers are eligible for the rebate, which is designed to kick-start the construction industry and put a maximum of $7,000 into the hands of new home owners.

In addition, this program keeps skilled tradespeople working, so that they can stay and build a life here at home.

As we promised, we are making good use of every single dollar of federal infrastructure funding available.

Among other things, that means we will proceed with almost all of the infrastructure funding commitments made by the previous government for this fiscal year.

We understand that a measured dose of stimulus is required to help this province get through hard economic times.

Like the nearly $100 million in needed infrastructure projects recently announced by the federal governmnet and the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, which will stretch from one end of the province to the other.

My government welcomes the federal government's leadership in stimulating the economy during this worldwide recession.

We will also do our part.

Already, we have kept our commitment to boost the equity tax credit by $1 million dollars, freeing up about $7.9 million for Nova Scotian businesses.

My government is open to working with businesses that are interested in investing in Nova Scotia — like Irving Shipbuilding. With the contract to build 9 patrol vessels, more than 150 Nova Scotians will be directly employed, and local companies will have an opportunity to bid on $32 million in goods and services.

Our efforts will be robust and well-focused as we develop the economy with business and labour leaders here ... and anywhere in the world.

My government will engage with the most dynamic economies in the world to showcase Nova Scotia's strategic transportation infrastructure. We will provide better ways for Nova Scotian exporters to get their products to global markets and encourage our province as a gateway to and from North America.

We will create an environment where success is celebrated ... where Nova Scotians are recognized for their ability to excel ... here at home and on the international stage.

One of the strengths of a modern economy and society is diversity.

Nova Scotia is no different.

That's why my government welcomes the fact that Nova Scotia now has the highest number of women serving in the Legislative Assembly at 12—4 of whom are in Cabinet.

Increased immigration is one way to help ensure that our communities thrive and our economy grows.

We intend to attract twice as many newcomers to Nova Scotia—and will work to help them settle successfully.

A new immigration strategy will be ready next year, which will set the direction for achieving this ambitious target. The strategy will also outline integration measures—such as enhanced language and employment training to further assist in the settlement process.

Executive Council will meet again with the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs. These meetings provide a firm foundation to build better government-to-government relationships and provide a forum to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Plans are under way to hold a series of health education workshops for African Nova Scotians at various locations across the province beginning this fall.

In partnership with the Black Business Initiative, our government will develop a niche market initiative that will focus opportunities in the African American tourism market.

Also, we know that in order to have a prosperous economy, we must have a healthy environment.

Within 60 days of taking office, my government put in place the first hard caps on greenhouse gas emission and air pollutants for power generation facilities in Canada.

By 2020, hard emission caps on the electricity sector will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 25 per cent from current levels.

My government intends to ensure that Nova Scotia is no longer one of the most fossil-fuel dependent provinces in Canada.

We will waste no time in making it happen.

We will also work with other governments and international partners to develop strong and collaborative global actions on climate change.

My government has set aggressive new targets for renewable energy. By 2015, 25 per cent of Nova Scotia's electricity will be supplied by renewable energy.

My government will release a comprehensive renewable energy strategy by 2010, providing clear direction on tidal, biomass, wind, solar, and geothermal opportunities.

My government will introduce legislation in 2010 that will promote the development, transmission, and use of clean energy sources, that will ensure Nova Scotia meets or exceeds provincial and national targets for 2020 and beyond.

We will investigate the full potential of the renewable energy that can be harnessed by the highest tides in the world, in the Bay of Fundy.

Nova Scotia is blessed with a magnificent coastline and an abundance of natural beauty.

My government will protect at least 12 per cent of the total land mass of Nova Scotia by 2015.

Additionally, we will establish a Community Land Trust to enable Nova Scotians to participate in the purchase of lands that can be used for conservation, wildlife and fish habitats, forestry, and outdoor recreation.

My government will complete a Natural Resources Strategy in 2010. Experts in the areas of forests, minerals, parks, and biodiversity will be consulted to help us manage our natural assets and shape the future of our natural resources.

Our goal is to create one of the cleanest and greenest environments and most sustainable and thriving economies in the world by 2020.

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A Learning Province

We will establish a graduate tax incentive, providing up to $15,000 to keep university and community college graduates here at home.

Education must be accessible. Our future prosperity depends on it.

The second Memorandum of Understanding on University Funding and Tuition Fees freezes tuition fees for all students at Nova Scotia universities through the 2010–11 academic year.

The government is working with post-secondary education institutions to consider innovative approaches to maximize the benefit from the Nova Scotia Crown Share University Infrastructure Trust Fund.

We are proud that Nova Scotia has the highest university enrolment per capita than anywhere else in Canada.

Enrolment capacity at the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) will continue to expand to meet labour market demands.

In year two of our mandate, we will create 250 new subsidized day- care spaces—in addition to the 300 licensed spaces recently announced. This brings us beyond the previous government's commitment of 1,000 spaces.

Giving children the best possible start positions them for success.

So does a public education system focused on excellence. Both are good reasons to live and raise a family in Nova Scotia.

The Nova Scotia School Accreditation Program will continue to engage schools in an extensive review of their performance and student achievement.

We will continue to support boards in providing mathematics and literacy mentor services to their schools.

In collaboration with boards and their schools, co-operative education opportunities will be expanded, as will the highly successful Options and Opportunities program—which focuses on community-based learning.

My government wants to ensure that every child counts in Nova Scotia.

An enhanced Mi'kmaq Liaison Office has been established, and its scope broadened to improve supports for Mi'kmaw and other Aboriginal students.

A review of the programs and services implemented in response to the BLAC report on Education—Redressing Inequity—Empowering Black Learners will be undertaken.

We will launch the Lighthouse Nova Scotia Program to help support great youth programs in community schools and recreation centres.

Every Nova Scotia student should have the opportunity to realize their full potential.

One of Nova Scotia's greatest assets is our well-trained, skilled, and educated population.

Accessible Health Care

Nova Scotians want a health-care system that serves them now and into the future.

As part of our commitment to keep ERs open, this year an emergency room advisor—working with the district health authorities—will provide leadership for the province and communities to improve care.

Nova Scotians can now access the Healthlink service ... where advice from a registered nurse allows callers to make informed decisions on their health-care needs.

We want the best possible health-care system for Nova Scotians. We also know that changes are needed in order to achieve and sustain it.

We will continue to foster innovative initiatives like the Patient Access Registry Nova Scotia. The registry will serve patients faster and help us make better decisions about where health-care resources should be placed.

For those requiring special treatment that is only available out of province, my government will implement a new travel and accommodation policy to provide assistance to families in their time of need.

My government will improve support for individuals with mental illness, and for their families.

We will collaborate with mental health service providers to identify, monitor, and refer youth requiring mental health supports.

Community-focused living bungalows will be developed to provide appropriate, respectful care for individuals coping with mental illness.

Next month, the first mental health court will open and will help people who need counselling and treatment instead of being held in custody or put in situations where conflict may arise.

Strong and Safe Communities

Modern infrastructure energizes our economy and provides the framework for a prosperous future.

My government is undertaking the development of a five-year capital plan for new highway construction, paving, and bridges.

The plan will be updated annually to ensure it is relevant and responsive to the needs of Nova Scotians.

To improve public safety, bridge and truck inspections will be enhanced. The number of staff at scale locations will be increased to expand hours of coverage.

My government is committed to improving secondary roads. We will increase resources for secondary road re-surfacing by fifty per cent.

Our primary industries have been the backbone of the Nova Scotia economy.

We will work with the forest industry to sustain the modern economic infrastructure and skilled workforce which will be this province's advantage as markets improve.

We will further encourage Nova Scotians to buy local.

My government will focus on the fishery of the future. We will work with our federal and provincial counterparts to ensure the industry has a long and sustainable future.

We will work to ensure that federal fishery policies reflect the needs of independent fishers.

We will promote agriculture as a positive economic, social, and environmental force and will help farm families maximize market opportunities.

Strong communities are safe communities.

My government will continue to work with communities to find effective crime prevention strategies.

My government will build on a partnership with municipalities from Cape Breton to Yarmouth to build stronger, healthier, and safer communities in Nova Scotia.

In the coming months, first responders will be able to locate callers dialing 911 from a cell phone — giving Nova Scotians the peace of mind that comes with knowing that help is on the way. Implementation begins this fall and will be complete for wireless carriers by the end of the year.

My government will respond to the recommendations of the Domestic Violence Prevention Committee, because everyone should feel — and be — safe at home.

In the next fiscal year, we will increase funding for transition houses to support the vital work they do in our communities.

In closing, our government would like to once again thank Nova Scotians for the faith they have placed in us.

It is an honour and a privilege to serve the people of this province.

My government is aware of the challenges that lie before us.

We are also very much aware of the opportunities that lie ahead.

My government will provide the careful stewardship that is needed to meet every challenge.

We will lead in the areas of innovation, in lifelong learning, in social prosperity, and in sustainable health.

We will make life more affordable and inclusive and will work hard to create a compassionate and just society.

We will also work very hard to ensure that Nova Scotia realizes **every** opportunity—taking its rightful place as a leader on the global stage.

Thank you.

God bless Nova Scotia.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

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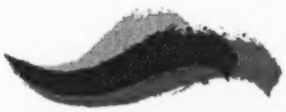

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